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My thesis is comprised of works that link private, intimate engagements with the public sphere. Consisting of performance and video installation, these works dive into the connections between the mundane rituals of the everyday, spiritual practices, and the natural and constructed landscape. Specifically mining the similarities and differences between the secular and sacred, my work attempts to understand how personal actions and experience can be meshed with the mystical encounters of the scenery I call home.

EARTHLY DISTILLATION

by

Kathryn L. Cook

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Approved by

Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by KATHRYN L. COOK has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____
Amy Purcell

Committee Members _____
Christopher Cassidy

Lee Walton

Sunny Spillane

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD TO PRESENT

From an early age, I was drawn to the concepts of land and nature. Growing up in the mountains of North Carolina, I was accustomed to having access to gorgeous mountain views and fresh rivers and lakes. Almost everywhere you turned, you would see a blue mountain vista glowing in the distance as green rolling tendrils of earth came galloping towards you. The mist from the waterfalls around the county would caress your face with a soft glisten as the water plummeted downward into the water holes below. I used to spend my afternoons at my grandmother's house after school while my parents were working. She had a tremendous impact on me growing up.

My sister and I would always spend hours in our grandmother's garden after completing our homework. We would work with our hands directly in the soil, tilling and sowing her vegetables for her to later preserve and can. For every meal, she would always cook an elaborate spread of food, all directly from her garden. She would always insist that we wash and scrub up before supper time. Her house was always immaculate. Nothing was ever out of place and everything was organized, tidy, and clean. My sister and I used to play in the stream by her house. We would pick up large stones and smash them down in the stream, attempting to get each other soaking wet. We played hide and seek in the woods behind her house and would sit on top of the rectangular concrete

hearth at the top of the hill between her two garden plots and sing as loud as we possibly could.

I don't ever remember my grandparents going to church very much, but I know that they must have because fellow church goers always asked us how they were doing. I remember going to their house on Sunday afternoons and listening to my grandmother put on her favorite minister through the old radio she had. We never talked very much during this time unless I had a question about what the reverend was saying.

I have never thought of myself as a very religious person, though that was the household I grew up in. My parents were both religious but not to the same extent as my grandparents, especially my grandmother. Whenever we went to the grocery store or somewhere about town, we would sometimes run into people that my parents knew, and we were always asked what church we attended. I remember hating this question when we quit going to church during my teenage years. It became this stigma.

My reverence for the outdoors was instilled in me not only by my grandparents, but also by my father. To this day, he takes me on his fishing trips. We usually go to the New River to fish for small mouth bass or to the outer banks to do some coastal fishing. After many years of accompanying him, I have come to find that he finds these retreats from the practicalities of life to be his oasis, his utopia. He finds his closeness with God, or something larger than himself, when he is out fishing. He says that the sand between his toes, the smell of the air, and the power of the fish as it fights against his pull are the elements that bring him this feeling of "ah" and to some extent, completeness.

Over the years, I have come to understand what he means. It is a closeness to the place I call home. It is when walking in the woods or swimming in the nearby lake that I have a closeness with something larger than myself. I feel complete and whole when in these spaces. It isn't just being amazed by nature, but it is a feeling unlike any other. I have carried it with me into adulthood and I seek it out. I find places about my hometown where I can do as my father and escape from what he calls "the rat race." It hasn't been until recently that I realized how large of an impact this would have on my artwork.

CHAPTER II

NOSTALGIA

During the time before I embarked on my journey to acquire a masters degree, I was working primarily with the human form and how figures when placed in certain landscapes and installations could evoke emotions that viewers would experience when they encounter something larger than themselves. I had recently returned from a trip to Italy for the first time where I had come upon massive cathedrals and churches that had a sense of overwhelming estheticism. A keen attention to detail was present in every aspect of these churches. Their relations to a spiritual experience for the viewer was what I wanted my artwork to have.

As time progressed, I began to have a strong sense of nostalgia for the days when these churches were built, and artists were commissioned by the church to create beautiful depictions of the human form. I came to realize that their depictions and connections with something larger than themselves wasn't the right solution for a woman working in the twenty-first century. My cultural norms concerning the sacred were vastly different from theirs during the Renaissance. The ways in which they represented a sacred experience would not be appropriate for 21st century culture. I was extremely perplexed.

I tried to get back to center. I went back to what I had learned from my father and grandmother in my childhood. I started taking long walks to get back in touch with that

mesmerizing feeling. Walking was my escape and turning to the romanticists and transcendentalists of the previous century flooded my vision and my attention. I admired their perceptions of landscape. I admired how every single strand of grass or dew droplet was just as important as the massive trees found in the Redwood Forest and the thundering clouds roaming overhead. Walking on trails was my way of connecting with them.

I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements. You may safely say, A penny for your thoughts, or a thousand pounds. When sometimes I am reminded that the mechanics and shopkeepers stay in their shops not only all the forenoon, but all the afternoon too, sitting with crossed legs, so many of them—as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon—I think that they deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago.
— Henry David Thoreau, Walking

The woods and trails I took were captivating and provided me with the bodily experience that I yearned for. I was able to interact with the landscape in a physical way. My body would heave and strain as I climbed the mountainous trails over boulders and up steep precipices. Photographs became my documentation of these encounters with nature and my home. I longed for wildness. I started creating drawings of my walks with a GPS tracker that tracked my body's movements. But, everywhere I looked, the wildness had a residue of the human hand. How could I unravel these ideas of full immersion in an outdoor space where you are stripped bare of everything that is ordinary and socially constructed? I strived for an experience in my artwork like I had found on the trails around my home. I was enveloped by the landscape around me. As I trekked through the

landscape, my body became a part of it. I was molding it with the imprints left by my feet. My movements and the sounds of twigs crunching underneath my feet became part of the melody of sounds that surrounded the trails. These included songs from birds chirping above my head or a squirrel racing along the ground to hide his nut for the winter.

Thinking of this time spent walking on the trails I became nostalgic again for a previous time when ideas for a spiritual connection to place could be established in a physical and metaphysical way. First hand stories of pilgrimage to Meca, The Dome of the Rock, The Haji, and The Church of the Holy Sepulchre had strongly influenced me. These stories told of the physical tasks that followers of a faith would undertake in their lifetime. They would travel, usually by foot, to a holy destination or holy site where they would pray to receive enlightenment. These journeys were extremely tasking physically, as the participants would have to walk miles on end; and in some cases, would crawl the entire distance. By the time they reached the holy site, they were utterly exhausted and while praying in these locations, would find themselves transformed by a spiritual experience of being present in these places of holiness. My artwork had always been my escape from the mundane. How could I connect these feelings and notions of a spiritual experience with a physical manifestation?

CHAPTER III

TRANSFORMATION

Art is a material act of culture, but its greatest value is its spiritual role, and that influences society, because it's the greatest contribution to the intellectual and moral development of humanity that can be made.
—Ana Mendieta

After coming to the realization that my walking drawings were heading into a dead end, I turned to an artist that had come to mind often since the beginning of my time at graduate school, Ana Mendieta. The elements of mysticism in her bodily performances out in the landscape were alluring to me. I was drawn to the physicality of her performances and her direct contact with the natural elements. Mendieta combined the physical with the mythological and the spiritual. During her performances, she transformed herself from a young Cuban immigrant into a mystical deity, the eternal woman; taking on more than just her own identity. The ephemeral quality of her work and the impermanence of the actions she performed in her rituals hit a nerve with me. Her studio was not in a square box but was in the natural landscape. She used her body to sculpt the landscape around her instead of inserting a form into that landscape. Why couldn't mine be as well?

Getting Ready for the Day was my first step into the concepts of using the body to perform a transformation. I collected dirt, charcoal, leaves, and clay mud slip and brought them back to my studio. I sat in front of the camera like I normally would in front of my

bathroom mirror or vanity. Instead of putting on makeup or brushing my hair to make sure that it wasn't too messy before going out, I applied the materials I had collected to my face. They became my war paint, my new skin, my new face. Applying these materials to my face became an act of disfiguration. I was no longer the young woman from the mountains making up my face, I was a creature, a mystical being that wasn't beautiful, but hideous. I destroyed the socially constructed labels of young womanhood and replaced them with an elemental being. I was no longer a young woman who was expected to get a job, get married and have children. I wasn't a woman who was expected to clean the house, do the laundry, and cook meals. I was something else. I became a transfigured woman with no obligations but those I wanted for myself. My appearance didn't matter because I was no longer a trophy for someone to gaze upon as a beautiful object. The creature I had become through this performance was only performing the duties that I designed for myself and not duties that were expected of me.

Pour 1 and *Pour 2* became a further exploration of the concepts of transformation through the performance of ritual. These pieces consisted of taking natural elements of dirt and water from my home and creating a slip mud mixture that I poured over my body while wearing white. The white was to symbolize innocence, purity, and marriage. These connotations to the color white was something that I had grown up with. When women are pure, virgins, and symbolized as innocent brides, they wear white. White was the color of my upbringing and symbolized the roles that a woman should have. At least this was what I was taught growing up. White became my jumping off point to deeply explore concepts of ritual. White in combination with pouring clay slip over my body repeatedly

was to confer a spiritual experience and heightened awareness of the self in relation to my home and changing landscape. I referred to the cycles that are seen in nature by repeatedly using the same clay slip until it was all distributed over my body. Again, I refer to Mendieta's use of transformation from individual into mystical being using natural elements and my own body.

I struggled with these works. They didn't quite fulfill my investigations into the connections between the body, the land, and the spiritual. I had modified my body by pouring clay on it but it didn't quite fulfill the ritual aspect of the work that I was striving for. I began to think about the rituals that I had been exposed to in childhood and more recently as my grandmother, who had passed away the previous spring. Losing her was an extremely hard transition for me. I kept thinking about her funeral service and the lowering of her casket into the ground. Her spirit had left and her body became part of the Earth again. It was a communal ritual where many friends and family participated to show their respects for her passing. It was an emotionally packed event that haunted me. How could I bring these qualities of the human condition into my performances?

Viewing became my answer for this. I gathered up some of my fellow classmates and colleagues to participate and enact a ritual where they would follow me in a procession to the place where I was to be buried under an oak tree. I had often visited this tree to relax, dwell, and contemplate. I led the procession carrying a ladle and gave two ladles to the people behind me. As we walked, I would beat the ladle on street signs, bricks, trees, and other objects as we proceeded down the street creating loud noises of

“dink, ponk, ting” as we went. I was dressed in a green gown with my hair done and makeup on. I was dressed formally for my burial.

Once we got to the spot under the oak tree, there was a pot of warm clay mud slip and bricks assorted in a rectangle. I gave the group instructions as to their roles and we began. I laid down on the bricks with my eyes closed and they proceeded to scoop the clay slip out of the pot and over my body until the pot was empty. They had almost immediately formed a line and were mostly silent. I stayed still for a few minutes before rising to signal the end of the performance.

During the performance I could feel their compassion or lack thereof by the way they poured the slip on my body. They first started with my feet and eventually moved up to my face. Most of them were extremely gentle showing a reverence for the action and the ritual which they were referring to and participating in. I thought this was a strong connection between how you would behave during a wake or viewing ceremony. The performance was successful in that it created an emotionally charged event that touched me very deeply and some of the participants as well. I enjoyed the fact that these were my peers who I had grown to know over the course of the semester. They were not strangers.

During this time, I had been researching early performance artists to see how they were interacting with natural materials and how they were engaging with the public. My interests of finding the relationship between the intimate, private ritual and the public sphere were starting to bloom. I considered artists like Marina Abramovich from the 1970s. Abramovich’s *Rhythm 0* was truly inspiring for me. She put all the control of the

work into the hands of the public. Through her performance, the public was able to manipulate her body any way that they wanted. She provided them objects and became the object of manipulation for the public to sculpt. I found this extremely intriguing and *Viewing* was a way to have people sculpt me while participating in a ritual. I gave them control of pouring slip over my body. But, my piece was different to that of Marina Abramovich's because she gave the public complete power. With my piece, I had only invited close friends and colleagues and gave them instructions of what to do. I did not give them several objects to use to manipulate my body with. Both mine and Abramovich's performances included the participation of people and the transfiguration of our bodies by others. But, mine was with colleagues I trusted. Not the public. I came to question the role of the public in my work and the participation of others in the performance. Was it necessary for others to perform these rituals with me or have a role in the ritual? Did I want the public to have the control of sculpting?

Viewing enlivened my curiosity and creativity. It was a powerful performance that enveloped my ideas about the ephemeral, the ritual, and the emotionally rigorous experience that one could have with a work of art. This work pushed me into a trajectory where I started considering other possible rituals I could perform. I wanted to get back to how the mundane could be brought to the public like I had in my previous piece, *Getting Ready for the Day*. I became interested in investigating how a personal, intimate, private ritual could be brought to a public sphere.

CHAPTER IV

CLEANSING

Contemplating what other personal rituals that I perform at home became a point of interest for me as I sought to figure out possible ways to bring intimate rituals into the public sphere. I didn't want these to just signify habits or hobbies that I do in my pastime. I wanted them to be able to have a double meaning. Where does the secular mundane world that we live in start and end and when does the sacred spiritual world begin and end? Enthralled by this idea, I thought of my childhood again. What rituals had I performed that were considered sacred acts?

I had grown up in a southern Baptist church so my childhood was packed with practices pertaining to Christianity. When I was ten years old, I had a baptism at my church where my whole family came. I remembered the pastor being gentle and loving. As he submerged me backwards underwater, I remembered the feeling of weightlessness. A new world had shown itself to me. It wasn't until I had started reminiscing about this moment that I realized I had experienced these same sensations before. It had been when I went swimming in a lake or river. It had been when I washed my body in the ocean on my fishing trips with my father. Water in the Christian faith was meant to wash away your sins and in the secular world it was meant to sterilize. I thought of doctors' offices and washing in hospitals. Here was my link!

Water was a natural element. It had various states and forms. It could be used for many purposes. Water was my connection between the secular and sacred. But, how would I use this for my research and my work? I didn't want to give up my clay. I enjoyed its malleability and its links directly to dirt, earth, and land. I wanted my work to be a guideline to a reconnection with my changing home. I was becoming perplexed.

Sometimes when I am stressed, I like to take a bath with candles and soft music. It may seem cliché but it aids me in washing away my troubles and slowing myself down. I did this one night after having a troubling studio visit with a visitor. As I was lying in the warm bath, it dawned on me that I this was a ritual I perform periodically. It seems like an ordinary task, but it has spiritual implications. It could be connected to baptism. I am washing myself clean. I am washing away my sorrows and my anxiety. I am renewing myself. Why couldn't I do this with clay?

The works of Ana Mendieta popped up in my head again. She had been nude for most of her performances and I knew that I would have to be for the one I was getting ready to embark on. I wasn't comfortable being nude on camera. It is complete vulnerability and exposure. I wasn't ready. I tried a few other projects but with a bathing suit where I would go out in a landscape and proceed to rip and pull grass from the ground or leaves from the trees and place them over my body. It became my camouflage from the social world and the world of expectations. I could feel freedom from the expectations of childrearing and marriage. My woman signifiers of makeup, dresses, and getting my hair done were not relevant here. I could escape from the womanly duties of cleaning, cooking, and focusing primarily on my appearance. Here in these fields and

forests, I could be free. It wasn't until later that I realized how the bathing suit hurt the action and the ritual. It wasn't leaving those expectations behind but by wearing the bathing suit bringing all the connotations and societal labels with me. By including the bathing suit, I was still a woman of the 21st century who was an object to be gazed upon. I wasn't transformed into a mystical being. I was still very much a young woman who was expected to cook, clean, get married, have children. I had to be nude for this to work.

I had been consulting with one of my professors on a regular basis who was helping me sort through my ideas and I asked her for help. She knew the struggles that I had been having with nudity and she offered to let me film on her farm with a cowboy bathtub she had acquired. *Bath* was beginning to formulate. It took a large amount of preparation. I ended up mixing the clay slip on site and she assisted me in moving the bathtub. I put several cameras in different locations to acquire different viewpoints. The multiplicity of shots that it provided gave me opportunities to reevaluate the performance from a critical standpoint.

Once everything was in place and the cameras had been rolling for a few minutes, I got undressed and walked to the bathtub. It was a warm day so the air on my skin didn't give me goosebumps. As I lowered my foot into the bath it was a strange sensation. Not like water at all. It was thicker and pressed against my skin more firmly than water. Once I lowered myself in, this pressure was encompassing me. I was nervous at first because of this strange sensation of cool pressure. My anxiety soon faded the more time I spent in the tub. Birds were chirping periodically in the distance and the breeze rustled the trees. I felt relaxed and connected to the place I was sitting in. The clay became my conduit.

Here in this bathtub covered with clay in a field, I was a child again. I was completely free of obligations and expectations. My mind drifted to times of playing in the bath in childhood with my rubber ducky. I wanted to play with my clay. Rolling around and splashing the clay over the sides of the tub. Complete delight was all that was on my mind. When I was done playing, I stepped out of the tub and walked into the field to feel the sun on my dirt covered body and face. It was euphoric.

The works of Charles Simmonds were connected to *Bath*. He performed a work called *Birth* where he literally was born from the Earth. He had gone to a clay pit in northern New Jersey where he covered himself completely with dirt. He didn't start filming until he began to emerge from the mound of earth that was encompassing him. He slowly moved and pulled himself out of the dirt and walked away. This piece had a strong influence on some of my ideas about *Bath*. Simmonds used the dirt as a conduit to show his connection to the Earth. I used clay as a conduit to reconnect with the Earth. He emerged from the Earth while I was receding back into it. These actions established a direct link between the body and the landscape. Both were in a relationship where there was a sense of unity.

Bath was a breakthrough in my work. This piece established the parameters of my practice that I had been searching for. The transition from the average, middle- class, young white woman to a being in tune with the rhythms of nature was a metamorphosis. There was a ritual that was being performed that included the washing away of the commonplace and stepping into the realm of the sacred. My body became the figure in the landscape, the stand-in for the figures I had previously tried to make and place in

fields, and forests. My presence became the icon, the idol, the human relation, the embodiment of the purities and imperfections in life. When reflecting on *Bath*, I came to the realization that the tension that I had experienced during the performance wasn't quite as present in the video. My search for the dynamics between the secular and the sacred weren't over. The main presence of the recognizable material realm was only present in the presence of the metal bathtub. I wanted to push the boundaries between these two further. What elements could I start to incorporate that would provide more tension and peculiarities?

CHAPTER V

THE SECULAR VS. THE SACRED

After *Bath* I began to contemplate the spectrum between realms of the sacred and profane. What were the elements that I could start to incorporate into my videos and how present or invisible should these elements be? What kind of tension can be pulled from the relationship between these elements.

Oftentimes I will take a drive on the Blue Ridge Parkway. It had been part of my front yard growing up on our ten acres of old family farmland. One day I took a drive to clear my head. I had just taken some video of a stream where I used to go sit as a teenager to draw. It had massive boulders and the sound of the water was soothing. I was on my way home when I hit the fog belt that sometimes envelops Deep Gap. At times this fog can be extremely thick and you can barely see ten feet in front of you. I pulled off at an overlook which normally has a tranquil nice mountain view with a field behind it leading into the woods. It was all opaque.

I was sitting in my car listening to music, waiting for the fog to lift a little when it dawned on me that the fog was water vapor. It was another state of water and as it trudged across the mountains it would leave them in a dew behind, a residue, a cleansing of vapor. I looked out my window at the field. I had a white dress with me that I had been planning to use for a video of a baptism in the New River nearby but it was 40 degrees outside and too cold to get into water without catching hypothermia. Why not use the air?

I jumped out of my car and quickly set up my camera. I proceeded to walk into the woods across the field from my car wearing the normal clothes that I had put on that morning. When I reappeared from the woods, I was dressed, barefoot in my white dress. I would eventually call this piece *Fog*. The air became my cleansing mechanism and my point for transformation in the landscape. It was the enveloping conduit like the clay had been in *Bath*. By wearing my normal, everyday clothes, I had brought the mundane into the work and by wearing the white dress, the spiritual. The white dress was a marriage with the land, an analogy for a reemergence of innocence; a return to a type of utopia where we remember that we are a participant in the shaping of the natural land. I am not using the previous connotations to white that I had previously grown up with. For me, my new white was encompassing the concepts of uniting the emotions and all the facets of what it means to be human. By this I mean that using my new white provides a way to connect with everyone and reidentify myself as a person that is connected to the environment that I live in.

The concept of transformation using natural elements was something that I had been looking at in Bill Viola's work. He made a work called *Ocean Without a Shore* where people slowly cross a threshold of downward flowing water. Through their movements through this threshold, they were transformed into a mystical being. This imagery had a strong impact on my creation of *Fog*. Bill Viola was using a natural material to allude to a transformation or transformative state. I was doing the same thing with the fog. But *Fog* was filmed in a natural setting where I didn't have any control over the elements. Bill Viola's work is highly manipulated and controlled in a studio setting.

He also uses actors to perform his works. I wanted my work to be a personal narrative of my journey towards transcendence.

Fog provided some insight into the spectrum between the sacred and the secular using air as the conduit and the types of clothes for the symbols of material culture and a spiritual realm. But I still wanted to push the limits of this spectrum further. What other elements of the secular could I bring into the work to create even more tension and nostalgia for a changing environment?

An idea of using a body of water and porcelain had been percolating in my head for some time. I had begun to consider where to film when I heard of the Belews Duke Power Plant. In late winter, the water was still cold, but the coal-ash plant pumped steam or warm water back into the lake, raising the water temperature. The lake was mainly meant for recreational use and I saw quite a few anglers out on their boats on my way to the performance site. I thought that the concepts of the secular might be emphasized through the presence of the industrial plant behind me.

Kayaking to the location site, I prepped and got ready. This place was unlike the other places that I had performed in because it was the one that made me feel the most vulnerable. Even with *Fog* and *Bath* I felt some level of comfort because I was not completely nude in a place where someone could stumble upon me. I walked backwards into the water and found out soon that this water was still cold but managed to continue. I felt cautious and fearful at first. During the action of bathing however, my fears were quieted.

Belews was another stepping stone in my search for the spectrum between the sacred and the secular. By placing myself performing a ritual action of bathing and cleansing in an environment that was being manipulated and changed by industry, I had captured the tension that I was looking for in my work. By the presence of the power plant, I had juxtaposed the concepts of natural cycles, ritual, transformation, and commerce together. My ritual action of performing a sacred act in the presence of the symbolic mountain of the corporate economy related to my own experience of the home that was changing around me. My hometown had been transitioning from a rural landscape into an urban one and continues to do so. My nostalgia and struggle for a time when one could experience nature that hadn't been demolished by a new strip mall was present in this work.

There was a quietness about this work that I found intriguing and connected to the artist Kim Sooja. She is also known as The Needle Woman for her performances where she stands starkly still in the middle of an overwhelming bustling street in a downtown area. Her works are placed in a very populated area, but they still have the same quietness that I found in my work. Because of her starkly still figure amongst all the other people around her moving quickly through the square, she brings a solitude to her work. *Belews* also has a great solidarity about it because I am alone performing this ritual in what seems like a vast space. How could I enhance this solidarity in my work to further emphasize a personal journey or narrative? How could sound influence my message of transformation?

I began to think of other spaces where I could make performances around my home that I had visited quite often growing up. There was one place that I had been to a handful of times with my father called Ker Scott Lake down in Wilkesboro. I found a dock where you could float out in the water. It was primarily a boat platform to use while you were lowering or pulling your boat out of the water. This was perfect. It had several small residences about the area and an overpass in the background. It was quiet except for the occasional car speeding over the overpass. I climbed up on the dock with my equipment and an old ceramic bowl used for canning and preserving vegetables. Once I was set up, I took off my shoes to feel the cool moist wood of the dock. I proceeded to walk to the end of the dock and lay out a towel and scooped up water from the lake. After this, I proceeded to wash my hair in the lake water and then dump it back into the lake.

Dock became my connection to the artist Janine Antoni who did a performance called *Loving Care*. In this performance, Antoni dunks her head into a bucket of hair dye while dressed in all black. She moved across the floor of a gallery in a sweeping motion with her hair soaked in the black hair dye as if she was the broom sweeping the floor. She makes connections to her identity as a woman using these societal tropes that are meant to represent womanhood. Actions of sweeping, mopping, and coloring your hair are all attributes relating to associations with women. By washing my hair with the lake water in normal clothes that I wear every day, I am referring to her work using an abnormal material in my hair. While she uses hair dye to refer to womanhood, I use the lake water to refer to washing and cleansing like a woman who goes to the beauty parlor. Both are rituals associated with the appearance of women.

It wasn't long after this that I started to reflect on some of the previous work that I had done. I kept referring to *Bath* and *Belews*. I enjoyed the use of porcelain and I wanted to find a new way to manipulate it with my body. I kept thinking of the ritual of the bath and the encompassing feeling that it produced. Maybe I could do this with porcelain. I wanted to procure a freestanding porcelain bathtub and put it in a public setting. I could re-perform *Bath* but with porcelain. This would be the opposite of the original *Bath* because it would be in a completely public space. I could bring a direct intimacy into the public sphere but this performance would also be at one end of the spectrum of combining a primal sensation and spiritual experience directly in the heart of the mundane and the everyday world.

I started my search for the porcelain bathtub. But, to no avail. I couldn't afford a freestanding porcelain bathtub. Even the ones that I found in salvage yards and online. How can I make this performance? I went home and soaked in my bath again. Once I was done, I looked in the mirror. I just stared at myself for while just thinking of ways to procure a bathtub. Then I heard a drop drip from the bathtub faucet. I looked back in the mirror. My bathtub was porcelain. Why not use that? It's the one that I've used since my childhood. The one I played in as child with my rubber ducky. Why not? Instead of performing in public, I could just show the video in public. This was one of my most intimate spaces and was just an ordinary space that was a part of my life. Why not use it to transform into a mystical being?

I got my porcelain together and dragged it upstairs. I plugged the drain so that no clay could go down the pipes. I really didn't want to have to explain to the plumber what

was wrong with my pipes and why there was a ton of clay in them. I ripped the chunks of porcelain from their bags and placed them in the tub. I hadn't mixed them into a slip like in *Bath*. I thought I could just use my body to sculpt the clay from a solid state into a slipmixture using my body. I started the video recording, filled the tub with water, and began. The clay was squishy beneath my weight and as I started to mold, shape, and wash with it, it started to break apart into smaller forms in the water, becoming a new state of being. I went through various states of emotions. Perplexed. Angry. Sad. Playful. Cheerful. I kept remembering that this was my childhood tub and it was a place of play.

As I was washing and mixing the clay with my body, I noticed that my transformation into a mystical being was through the application of the clay to my face and hair. I became distorted and no longer resembled the brown-haired girl that I once was. As the performance video progresses, the imagery becomes whiter and whiter until you can hardly tell the difference between my body and the background of the porcelain tub. Reflecting back on the piece I found a few parallels to the work of Olivier de Sagazan from Africa who uses references of shamanism in his work *Transfiguration*. In this performance, he remolds his face using elements from the earth. By doing this he is remaking his face, his mask, his identity, his recognizable form. I admire his work and how it stems from shamanism since I am interested in these practices of ritual. But, my work diverges from his because he expresses the spectrum of the line between the animal and the human. My work, especially *White Bath* is not an aggressive animalistic manipulation of my form but a careful, delicate manipulation that exudes the spectrum of human emotion and this transformation from one being into an essence, or something

completely unworldly. I still have questions as to how we both become consumed by the landscape around us. How do I find ways to push this further? How do I include a melding of spaces and body into a landscape while still holding onto physicality?

CHAPTER VI

THE INTANGIBLE AND THE PHYSICAL

Even though *Belews, Dock, and White Bath* encompassed most of the elements that I am interested in presenting in my work, I wanted my work to have a physicality to it. I wanted physicality that was like Kate Gilmore's work where she has women rip, grab, tear, kick, and pull an enormous box of clay apart. Being trained as a sculptor I was used to thinking of the body in relation to the object and its surroundings. In my videos, I had become the object in the vast surrounding landscape. But, I wanted the people who viewed my work to have a similar experience. How could I do this?

In the previous weeks I had been accompanying some of my fellow artists to salvage places to look for possible items that could assist us in our projects. I had imagined that I would purchase a freestanding porcelain bath.

One day, I took my colleagues to a place that I had discovered in a nearby town called Winston Salem. There I had found a place called Architectural Salvage that had several items that were used in the building of houses and interior spaces. While here, I was looking at their collection of bathtubs and sinks and discovered some ceramic sinks that had been stacked on top of each other. Each one was slightly different, and I enjoyed their uniformity. I bought several of them on a whim to see if I could use them later.

I had been contemplating more about the notions I had with intimacy and what that really meant. I had not too long ago purchased an action camera where I could acquire video shots from underwater. I was excited to try it out on a sketch I had. This shot would be of me washing my face as moving it back and forth in the water but shot from underneath so that you could see me facial expression and the movement of my hair. I knew I wanted a strong light source behind me to block out the memetic imagery of the bathroom. At the end of the video, I lifted my head up and let the water drip down from my hair to make ripples in the water. When I was editing the video later, I loved the abstracting quality that this action had on the screen because it pushed the barriers between the recognizable and the bizarre. But, the piece had a deep intimacy about it because the viewer was looking directly at my face during a moment of privacy.

It was soon after shooting this video that I started experimenting with the size of the projection and the screen. Remembering that I had purchased some sinks a while back, I tested to see what the video would look like in the sink. At first, I just projected onto the sinks but didn't like the distortion of the image because it didn't imply an intimacy with the viewer. When the sinks were lined up, one on top of the other, you could gaze down through the drains all the way to the bottom where the sinks rested. I tried playing the video on my phone and submerging it into the sinks like I had done my face in the water. By doing this, the viewer would have to come up close to the sinks and peer inside to see the video. This created the intimacy that I was looking for between image and viewer.

I was creating the intimacy using distance the same way that Pipolotti Rist had used in one of her pieces called *Selfless in the Bath of Lava* where she put a video in the floor of the gallery space. In the video Rist is nude and screaming up at the viewer as she is surrounded by fire meant to refer to the confines of hell. By putting her video in the floor, she is transfixing the initial role of the viewer to the work. They are no longer on the same horizontal plane and there is an intimacy because in order to see the video more closely, the viewer has to look or stoop down to the floor to see the imagery more clearly. This influence led to my decision to put the video into the void of the sink drain.

The sinks had two drains and this video only filled one of those spaces. I didn't want to leave the second viewpoint a void into nothing. Again, I began to contemplate what in my life was an intimate moment. Eventually, I asked my partner and boyfriend to become part of the piece with and reenact the same action that I had done. He was happy to assist. By his participation, the piece became a shared moment of intimacy between him, myself, and the viewer. The sinks, the videos, and the viewers would be entangled in a moment of seeing and being seen. By the viewer looking at the videos and leaning over the sinks, they too would be gazed upon by other people in the surrounding area. The physicality that I had been looking for was playing with voyeurism and connotations of who was seeing who. Instead of me becoming the object of the male gaze and something to be looked at, the viewer became the object of observation and the gaze of the public.

Do You See Me? was just the beginning into my explorations of how to bring a physicality to my work. The next piece that I embarked on was in opposition to the closeness of the previous piece. Looking back at the work that I had made thus far, I was searching for ways the viewers could experience being encompassed by the work and become a part of it the way that I was experiencing the pieces when I was performing them. A vast landscape encompassed me. I wanted them to be encompassed in the pieces. I changed the size of the screen and transitioned from a horizontal layout into a vertical one. By rotating the screens and making them seven feet tall, they became the bodies with the landscape projected onto them. These were like earlier pieces I had done called *Silhouettes*. In this work, I projected video of landscapes onto my back and photographed my backside. This work was an experimentation with the merging of the body and landscape where the body became the projection screen.

In total there are three screens lined up in unison with one another to create a type of corridor. Projections of a waterfall near my house plays on one side of the screens while a projection of a bathtub filling up with water plays from the other side. Between the screens, there is space for someone to pass through and become the figure that is stepping into these different landscapes. One is an intimate bathroom setting to get clean and the other is a vast natural setting where you would go to relax or go swimming with friends. The combination of these two environments with the figure walking between the two offers a space for the boundaries between these two vastly

different landscapes to blend and meld into one another. This piece became *Body Shades* because of the transition of the viewer from passive observer into participant where their bodies became the shaded figure in the imagery on the screens.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Throughout my time in graduate school I have been struggling with ideas of the human condition, emotion, landscape, home, the body, and a spiritual experience. My work has progressed from that of depicting the relationship of the figure in the landscape using a recreation of the human form to the use of my own body and the body of the viewer. My search to find and distort the boundaries between the secular world around me and the sacred world of childhood and in nature are still at the beginning stages.

Bath, Fog, Belews, Body Shades, and Do You See Me? establish a trajectory for the direction of my works in the future. The links between my pieces are in dialogue with a developing personal narrative between the realm of the spiritual and the mundane. As time progresses, I intend to continue using video and performance as tools to explore this terrain. I still have questions that will continue to make me search for answers in the spectrum between the secular and the sacred pertaining to a changing landscape. I take the following words by Mary Oliver to heart as an encouragement to never stop searching for places where my imagination and enthusiasm for questioning thrive.

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.
— Mary Oliver

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APPENDIX A

CATALOG OF IMAGES

Figure 1. Self, video, 12:59, 2017

Figure 2. Pour 1, video, 5:19, 2017

Figure 3. Pour 2, video, 2:44, 2017

Figure 4. Viewing, video, 15:31, 2017

Figure 5. Bath, video, 32:42, 2017

Figure 6. Silhouettes, photo prints,

Figure 7. Fog, video, 4:06, 2018

Figure 8. Belews, video, 9:27, 2018

Figure 9. Dock, video, 9:27, 2018

Figure 10. White Bath, video, 47:53, 2018

Figure 11. Do You See Me?, ceramic sinks, 2 iphones, video, 3:05, 3:37, 2018

Figure 12. Body Shades, steel, plexiglass, video, 16:40, 4:10, 2018

APPENDIX B

FIGURE 1. SELF



Figure 1. Self, video, 12:59, 2017

APPENDIX C

FIGURE 2. POUR 1



Figure 2. Pour 1, video, 5:19, 2017

APPENDIX D

FIGURE 3. POUR 2



Figure 3. Pour 2, video, 2:44, 2017

APPENDIX E

FIGURE 4. VIEWING



Figure 4. Viewing, video, 15:31, 2017

APPENDIX F

FIGURE 5. BATH



Figure 5. Bath, video, 32:42, 2017

APPENDIX G

FIGURE 6. SILHOUETTES



Figure 6. Silhouettes, photo prints,

APPENDIX H

FIGURE 7. FOG



Figure 7. Fog, video, 4:06, 2018

APPENDIX I

FIGURE 8. BELEWS



Figure 8. Belews, video, 9:27, 2018

APPENDIX J

FIGURE 9. DOCK



Figure 9. Dock, video, 9:27, 2018

APPENDIX K

FIGURE 10. WHITE BATH



Figure 10. White Bath, video, 47:53, 2018

APPENDIX L

FIGURE 11. DO YOU SEE ME?



Figure 11. Do You See Me?, ceramic sinks, 2 iphones, video, 3:05, 3:37, 2018

APPENDIX M

FIGURE 12. BODY SHADES



Figure 12. Body Shades, steel, plexiglass, video, 16:40, 4:10, 2018